Emergent BioSolutions Applauds Pharmacy Leaders on Consensus Guidelines for Naloxone

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First-ever Canadian national consensus guidelines which recommend all patients receiving an opioid should be dispensed take-home naloxone and counselled by a pharmacist.

MISSISSAUGA, ON, Sept. 24, 2020 /CNW/ - Emergent BioSolutions today announced its strong support for the new *Canadian national consensus guidelines for naloxone prescribing by pharmacists* published in the Canadian Pharmacists Journal for aiming to bring clarity and consistency to naloxone prescribing, which may ultimately help reverse more opioid poisonings until medical help arrives.

"Pharmacists are a critical part of a community and are truly on the frontlines of the opioid crisis," said David Renwick, Vice President & General Manager, Emergent BioSolutions Canada. "These consensus guidelines set a new standard of care in ensuring naloxone gets into the hands of those who need it – especially those who don't recognize the risk their opioid prescription may pose. Having naloxone on hand can make a real difference when an accidental opioid poisoning occurs."

Recent reports indicate disturbing numbers of opioid-related deaths across Canada: in 2019, there were 3,823 opioid-related deaths, with the highest rates in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario.[i] A 2016 report found a significant number of opioid poisoning deaths involve individuals who had an active or recent prescription for an opioid at time of death.[iv] Naloxone can help reverse the effects of an opioid overdose until medical help arrives. Despite the availability of take-home naloxone kits, naloxone dispensing by pharmacies is highly variable.[ii]

A steering committee of eight pharmacists from relevant practice and professional settings across Canada was convened to develop the consensus guidelines. The guidelines recommend all patients receiving an opioid should also be dispensed a naloxone kit and be counselled by a pharmacist. They also recommend pharmacists follow up with patients after three months and again at one year after dispensing naloxone, as well as conducting ongoing yearly follow ups.

These new consensus guidelines recommend that naloxone be dispensed proactively to all patients receiving opioids as it can be difficult for pharmacists to accurately assess the potential risk of opioid overdose. Approximately 1 in 8 (~4.7 million) people in Canada were prescribed opioids in 2018, representing a large number of people at risk for potential opioid-related toxicities and overdose.[iii] The data show prescription opioids can be involved in deaths due to opioid poisonings – as an example, around one-quarter to one-third of opioid-related deaths in Ontario involved individuals who had active prescription opioids at the time of their death.[iv, v]

Expanding access to naloxone and informing patients with prescription opioids on its use is also a priority issue in the United States. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) now requires that labelling on opioid medications be updated to recommend health care professionals discuss the availability of naloxone, both when beginning and renewing treatment.[vi] It also recommends health care professionals discuss naloxone with all patients when prescribing opioid pain relievers or medicines to treat opioid use disorder, and consider prescribing naloxone to those at increased risk of opioid overdose.[vii]

About Emergent BioSolutions
Emergent BioSolutions is a global life sciences company whose mission is to protect and enhance life. Through our specialty products and contract development and manufacturing services, we are dedicated to providing solutions that address public health threats. Through social responsibility, we aim to build healthier and safer communities. We aspire to deliver peace of mind to our patients and customers so they can focus on what's most important in their lives. In working together, we envision protecting or enhancing 1 billion lives by 2030.

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i Government of Canada. Opioid-related harms in Canada [Available from: https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids/maps?index=15].

ii So R, Al Hamarneh Y, Barnes M, Beazely MA, Boivin M, Laroche J, et al. The status of naloxone in community pharmacies across Canada, 2020. [Available from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1715163520958435].

iii Canadian Institute for Health Information. Opioid Prescribing in Canada: How Are Practices Changing? 2019. [Available from: https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/opioid-prescribing-canada-trends-en-web.pdf].

iv Choremis B, Campbell T, Tadrous M, Martins D, Antoniou T, Gomes T. The uptake of the pharmacy-dispensed naloxone kit program in Ontario: A population-based study. PloS one. 2019;14(10):e0223589-e.

v Gomes T, Khuu W, Martins D, Tadrous M, Mamdani MM, Paterson JM, et al. Contributions of prescribed and non-prescribed opioids to opioid related deaths: population-based cohort study in Ontario, Canada. BMJ. 2018;362:k3207.

vi U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *FDA Requiring Labeling Changes for Opioid Pain Medicines, Opioid Use Disorder Medicines Regarding Naloxone*, July 23, 2020. [Available from: https://www.fda.gov/news-events/press-announcements/fda-requiring-labeling-changes-opioid-pain-medicines-opioid-use-disorder-medicines-regarding].

vii U.S. Food and Drug Administration. *FDA recommends health care professionals discuss naloxone with all patients when prescribing opioid pain relievers or medicines to treat opioid use disorder*, July 23, 2020. [Available from: https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-recommends-health-care-professionals-discuss-naloxone-all-patients-when-prescribing-opioid-pain].